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## THE RELIGION OF JUDAH FROM JOSIAH TO EZRA.

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1. *The religious condition of Judah at the beginning of Josiah's reign.*—At the beginning of Josiah's reign (639 B. C.) two great religious parties or tendencies were struggling for the mastery. The first we may call the traditional or popular party. It included the mass of the people of Judah, the aristocracy, and the priesthood. It was thus the orthodox religion of the state, fortified with all the authority of tradition. Its adherents worshiped Yahweh, the national god of Israel. They regarded him as a tutelary deity, who was bound to his people by ties of natural kinship. Between him and his worshipers there existed a covenant, in virtue of which he was bound to defend them, provided they rendered to him his proper tribute. His demands were not exorbitant. His feasts must be kept up with regularity and splendor. Numerous sacrifices must be offered on his altars. Firstlings and first fruits must be devoted to him. If these conditions were fulfilled, he would be satisfied and would bless his faithful people.

The idea that he made any moral demands was generally repudiated. Immorality was universal. The ruling classes oppressed the poor with the utmost cruelty (Zeph. 1:9; Jer. 2:34). The judges were venal (Zeph. 3:3). The priests were corrupt, and the common prophets gave favorable oracles in proportion to the pay that they received (Zeph. 3:4).

Society was rotten to the core, and the dissolution of the Jewish state was imminent; yet the nation as a whole was confident of the continued favor of its patron-god and fondly believed that somehow he would save it from the impending catastrophe. The fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B. C., instead of warning Judah that a similar fate was in store for her, had convinced her

rather that she was the favorite of Yahweh, and the escape of Jerusalem from Sennacherib in 701 B. C. had deepened the belief that the temple on Mount Zion was inviolable. Yahweh as thus conceived differed little from Baal of Canaan, Chemosh of Moab, or Molech of Ammon. He was essentially a tutelary, national deity, whose requirements were ritual rather than ethical.

From a Yahweh-worship of this type it was but a short step to ordinary Semitic heathenism. Yahweh had early been identified with Baal, and the old high places of the Baals, with their accessories of pillars and sacred trees, had been adopted as seats of his worship. This cult was still in full force at the beginning of Josiah's reign (Zeph. 1 : 4 ; Jer. 2 : 8, 23). Close contact with the Assyrians, from the days of Ahaz onward, had encouraged a further syncretism (2 Kings 16 : 10-16). Manasseh had gone all lengths in the attempt to blend the religion of Israel with the religions of the neighboring nations (2 Kings 21 : 2-9 ; 23 : 4-14 ; Jer. 15 : 4). At the beginning of Josiah's reign this syncretism was unabated. The people "worshiped Yahweh and swore by Molech" (Zeph. 1 : 5). Judah was full of foreign cults and foreign heathenish customs (Zeph. 1 : 8, 9 ; Jer. 2 : 10). Images apparently were used everywhere in the worship of Yahweh (Jer. 2 : 27 f.). Thus the religion of Israel as held by the popular party was in danger of losing its distinctive features and being absorbed in the chaos of religions that filled western Asia.

Over against the traditional, popular party stood the reforming, or prophetic, party. It aimed at the removal of foreign cults from Judah and of foreign elements from the religion of Yahweh. It antagonized foreign alliances as likely to lead to increased religious syncretism. It perceived that the old high places were so corrupt that they could never become seats of a reformed religion. The temple at Jerusalem, however, it recognized as maintaining a relatively high type of worship. This sanctuary was of pure Hebrew origin and had none of the primitive Canaanite associations that attached to the high places. It was capable of reformation, the high places were not ; the prophets agitated, therefore, for an abolishing of the local shrines of Yahweh and a centralization of worship in Jerusalem.

The prophets were not content, however, with the mere effort to remove alien elements from the ancient religion of Israel. They saw that the sole distinction of that religion from others lay in its *ethical* conception of Yahweh and of the conduct that he requires. If this ethical element were ignored, there would be nothing to distinguish Yahweh from any of the patron-gods of other nations, and the door would always be open to the syncretism that they wished to overcome. Accordingly, they insisted that Yahweh must not be conceived as a tutelary deity like Baal, but as "the Holy One of Israel," and that the homage which he requires is not ritual but righteousness (Am. 5 : 21-24 ; Hos. 6 : 6 ; Isa. 1 : 10-17 ; Mic. 6 : 6-8). They declared also that, unless Judah repented and reformed its life, Yahweh would not spare it, but would give it up to the same fate that should befall other nations.

As they thus emphasized the moral element in religion and ignored the ceremonial, the prophets had come to see more and more clearly that Yahweh was essentially different from the non-moral or immoral gods of the nations. They had advanced from the old Hebrew doctrine, that among the gods Yahweh alone is to be worshiped, to the new doctrine, that there is no God but Yahweh and all the gods of the nations are *'elîlîm*, "non-entities." By the time of Josiah the religious conflict was clearly defined. The traditional party stood for ritualistic henotheism, the reforming party for ethical monotheism.

At the beginning of Josiah's reign the relation of the two parties was substantially the same as it had been under Manasseh. The traditional party was in power ; the prophetic party was mocked and persecuted ; but, although few in numbers, it was strong in the consciousness of the truth of its message and of the spiritual unity of its members (Mic., chaps. 6-7).

2. *Josiah's reformation.*—In the early part of King Josiah's reign an event took place which materially altered the religious situation. About 626 B. C. there came a sudden irruption of Scythian hordes into western Asia, who, like the Huns and Tartars of later times, left death and desolation in their wake. According to Herodotus, they spread their ravages as far as the

borders of Egypt. Apparently Judah was destined to fall into their hands. The general consternation which this calamity awakened encouraged the prophets to preach reformation. Zephaniah appeared on the scene with the announcement that the long-predicted "Day of Yahweh" was at hand. Upon Judah, as upon all the other nations, the final doom was coming; the nation could not escape, only the "afflicted of the land," that is, the persecuted prophetic party. Jeremiah also began his ministry about the same time, and in similar strain declared: "Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land" (Jer. 1:13-15; 4:6 f.).

Upon the king at least the preaching of these prophets seems to have produced an effect, for he set about a restoration of the temple (2 Kings 22:3 f.) and made an attempt to restrict the high places (2 Chron. 34:3-7). Probably nothing more would have come of these efforts than of Hezekiah's reforms (2 Kings 18:4, 22) but for an incident that occurred in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (621 B. C.). Shaphan, the scribe, being sent by the king to Hilkiyah, the high priest, to obtain money for the payment of the workmen engaged on the temple, was given a book that Hilkiyah had found in the temple. The narrative of 2 Kings, chaps. 22-23, gives so full a description of the contents of this book, and of the reforms that were based upon it, that it is clear that it can have been nothing else than the book of Deuteronomy. It falls outside the scope of our inquiry to investigate whether this was an ancient code that had been lost, or whether it was a recent work that had incorporated ancient legislative material; we are concerned only to note the effect that the finding of this book had upon the religious struggle of Josiah's age.

Deuteronomy corresponds remarkably with the programme that the prophets had set before themselves since the time of Isaiah. It is uncompromising in its hostility to mingling the religion of Yahweh with foreign elements. It denounces the high places as an abomination and prescribes that sacrifice may be offered only in "the place that Yahweh will choose out of all thy tribes" (Deut. 12:4-14; 14:22-27). Its conception of

Yahweh is lofty and ethical. It has little to say about ritual, but lays great stress upon righteousness as the one thing that is acceptable to Yahweh, and it teaches that this righteousness can spring only from a heart filled with love toward God. It pronounces curses upon the nation that fails to keep its moral requirements. Deuteronomy, accordingly, embodies the highest ideals of prophetism and was well adapted to be a manual of prophetic instruction. Rightly or wrongly, from the time of its discovery it was believed to be an authentic writing of Moses and as such to be binding upon the nation.

When this book was read before King Josiah, he rent his garments in distress at the thought of the ruin that must come upon his people. In his alarm he turned to the prophetic party for advice. It knew well how to utilize the opportunity. It at once adopted Deuteronomy as its standard, and insisted that its provisions should be put into operation. Huldah, the prophetess, when consulted by the king, announced that all the curses written in this book would come upon Judah (2 Kings 22 : 15 f.). Jeremiah, as we know from his book, welcomed Deuteronomy with all his heart. He himself read it to the people (Jer. 11 : 2), reiterated its curses in case of disobedience (11 : 3-5), and even went about the cities of Judah proclaiming the words of "this covenant" (11 : 6-8).

Wrought upon by all these influences, the nation turned in favor of the prophetical party, and the king determined to institute a reformation in accordance with the provisions of this book. The temple was purged of the images and foreign rites that Manasseh had introduced, the high places were abolished and their priests prohibited from ministering to Yahweh, a great passover was celebrated "as it is written in this book of the covenant," and all the people pledged themselves to keep the deuteronomic covenant (2 Kings, chap. 23).

Apparently the victory of the prophetical party was complete. Time soon showed, however, that the traditional religion was not slain, but only wounded. Before many years the majority of the nation had turned back from the strenuous, spiritual religion of the prophets and of Deuteronomy to the old easy-

going, sensual religion of their forefathers. Josiah's untimely death in battle with Pharaoh Necho, at Megiddo, in 608 B. C., gave this movement increased momentum, for men construed it as a sign of the futility of keeping the deuteronomic covenant. Under Jehoiakim the reactionary party again obtained control, reversed the reforms of Josiah, abandoned the covenant, and refused to listen to the prophets. Jeremiah was soon constrained to say (II: 9-17): "A conspiracy is formed among the men of Judah . . . they are turned back to the iniquities of their first fathers . . . they have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers." Jer., chap. 7, gives a vivid picture both of the popular religion of this period and of the prophetic preaching in antagonism to it. "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, is this. . . . Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn sacrifice unto Baal, and walk after other gods, whom ye have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are safe; that ye may do all these abominations? . . . But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I caused my name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. . . . Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done unto Shiloh."

The prophet has in mind the impending Babylonian catastrophe. In 604 B. C., Nebuchadrezzar defeated Necho, and from that time Jeremiah saw that Babylon was destined to be the dominant power in the world, and declared that Judah must fall and Jerusalem be razed. This declaration was the signal for a fresh outbreak of persecution of the adherents of the prophetic party. Jeremiah was arrested on the charge of high treason and narrowly escaped being put to death by Jehoiakim (Jer. 26: 10-24). Another prophet, Urijah, fell a victim to the king's rage (Jer. 26: 21-23).

3. *The exile.*—The judgment which Jeremiah had predicted all his life fell in the reign of Jehoiachin. He came to the throne

in 598 B. C., and reigned only three months before Nebuchadrezzar carried him away, with all the better class of the nation, into captivity in Babylonia (2 Kings 24: 8-16). The national life of Judah was practically at an end, but of this it was impossible even now to convince the adherents of the traditional religion. They were still unmoved to repentance, and Ezekiel's standing designation for them was "rebellious house." The old conviction that Yahweh was a tribal god, who would not suffer his favored kingdom to fall or his temple to be destroyed, was still cherished even by the exiles. They insisted on living in Babylonia as transients who might return to Judea at any moment, so that Jeremiah was obliged to write, urging them to give up these vain hopes and settle down in the land of their captivity (Jer., chap. 28).

The dregs of the nation that remained in Judea were equally unaffected by the national disaster. They regarded themselves as spared because of their greater righteousness and despised those that had been taken captive (Ezek. 11:15). Confident that the worst had happened and that Jerusalem could not fall, they made no attempt at reformation.

In the ninth year of his reign Zedekiah revolted against Nebuchadrezzar, who promptly came up and besieged Jerusalem two years. During this time, to the great indignation of the authorities, Jeremiah continued to prophesy that the city would fall. In 568 B. C. this event took place; Jerusalem was razed and the temple burned. A second deportation was then made, and the nation of Judah ceased to exist.

Up to the last moment both the exiles and the survivors had believed that their holy city would escape. Now that the blow had actually fallen, they sank down in blank despair. The more obstinate adherents of the traditional religion concluded from this catastrophe that Yahweh was a god powerless to help his worshipers. They therefore forsook him and adopted the gods of Babylon. They were speedily absorbed in the native population and ceased longer to have significance for the history of Israel. The majority, however, saw in the calamity a token of divine judgment and vindication of the prophets whom they



had persecuted. In their despair one comfort at least remained : the prophets had told the truth and might be trusted. The Yahweh of the traditional religion had left them in the lurch, but the Yahweh of prophetism still remained. The Jews, accordingly, turned eagerly to men like Ezekiel, whom before they had despised, to hear what they would say in this new emergency.

The prophets rose to the situation. They ceased their threatenings of doom, and began to comfort and encourage the exiles with promises of restoration. Both in public and in private they preached separation from the heathen, exclusive worship of Yahweh, and righteousness in his service. The fragments of the ancient prophetic literature that had survived the fall of the nation they carefully gathered. Out of the old secular records they compiled religious histories, which aimed to show how failure to keep the law of Deuteronomy had always brought disaster upon Israel. They organized the exiles into Sabbath congregations (a prototype of the synagogue), in which the sacred books were read. Thus in a quiet way, largely by individual persuasion, a reformation was brought about more deep and lasting than any that had preceded it. The Jewish community was kept apart from the heathen, it was weaned from its love of syncretism, and the idea was fixed that Yahweh is the only God, and that he requires righteousness in his service.

Half of the battle of prophetism was won. All that remained to make the victory complete was the recognition that ritual is valueless in the sight of Yahweh, and that obedience to his moral law is all that he requires. The exile might have been expected antecedently to have fostered this conception by making the practice of the ritual impossible, but the power of ancient prejudice was still too great. The Jews of the exile, with that same fatuity which characterized their descendants after the destruction of the second temple, attributed the fall of Jerusalem to the remissness of their forefathers in ritual matters as well as to their moral shortcomings. Instead of accepting the divine verdict in history and beginning to practice spiritual religion without ritual,

they became more zealous than ever to fulfil ceremonial righteousness. The priests busied themselves with gathering all that had survived of the old liturgical literature, and, as far as was possible, the ceremonies of the ancient religion were laid upon the conscience of the nation as of equal authority with the moral requirements of Yahweh.

It is true that voices were still raised in support of the genuine prophetic doctrine, "righteousness, not ritual." The great unnamed prophet of the exile declared that Yahweh had not missed the sacrifices and offerings which Israel in captivity had been unable to bring to him, and represented him as saying: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake" (Isa. 43:22-25). He taught also that Yahweh had accepted the undeserved sufferings of the righteous portion of the nation, "the servant of Yahweh," in lieu of sacrifices. His view, however, did not prevail. The prophetic movement had spent its energy and was beginning to decline. In the main it succumbed to the spirit of the age, and, having won a half victory, was willing to compromise with the traditional party. Ezekiel is the leading representative of this tendency. In his utterances delivered after the fall of Jerusalem he abandons the old prophetic position, "righteousness instead of ritual," and takes up the position, "righteousness and ritual." In chaps. 40-48 of his book he even goes so far as to lay down an elaborate plan for the rebuilding of the temple and the reëstablishing of its ceremonies at the time when Judah shall be restored from exile.

4. *The restoration.*—The Jews soon had the opportunity to put their religious ideals into practice. In 538 B. C., Cyrus captured Babylon, and in 536 B. C. he granted permission to the exiles to return to their own land. Few were willing to leave their homes in Babylonia, but all were anxious to see the temple rebuilt and its sacrificial ritual reëstablished. Accordingly, those who were willing to try their fortunes with the colony were encouraged by those who stayed in Babylonia, and the cost of the expedition was defrayed by the Jews as a body. This shows that all were interested in the undertaking, and that all expected an increase

of divine favor from the moment that sacrifice was offered again in the ancient place. The distinctly religious and ritualistic character of the undertaking is also shown by the large proportion of priests that took part in it.

The first act of the immigrants was to set up an altar on the exact original site of the altar of the first temple, and to offer upon it the daily morning and evening sacrifices. The feasts also were kept in their due course. The foundation of the new temple was laid, but, owing to the hostility of the neighboring tribes and the extreme poverty of the colony, it was impossible to proceed with it for sixteen years. In the second year of Darius, 520 B. C., however, work was begun again, and four years later the edifice was completed, and the ritual was set in operation with as much splendor as the poverty of the community would admit. The Jews both of Palestine and of Babylonia were confident that now Yahweh would bless them, seeing that at last he was worshiped in the right way.

Only one step remained that ceremonialism might attain its perfect development : the ritual must receive canonical authority. This step was taken at the time of Ezra's second visit to Jerusalem. He then brought with him from Babylonia a "book of the law," which contained not only Israel's early history and Deuteronomy, but also the body of technical priestly legislation that is found in our present Pentateuch. Whether or not this legislation had been in existence before the exile we cannot discuss here. It is enough to observe that prior to this time it cannot have been combined with the ancient sacred history and with Deuteronomy. The new, enlarged law-book, which was practically our Pentateuch, Ezra laid before the national assembly in Jerusalem (Neh., chaps. 8-9), and it was adopted, as apparently it had been already by the Jews in Babylonia, as part of the fundamental law of Israel. Thus the ritual took its place beside the moral and spiritual requirements of Deuteronomy as equally canonical and equally important. The triumph of ritualism was complete.

To be sure, the authority of Yahweh's moral law was still recognized, but, as is always the case when ritual is regarded as

equal to righteousness, morality was formally conceived as outward obedience to a specific body of enactments. The oft-repeated words of Nehemiah, "Remember me, O my God, for good, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done," are characteristic of the ethical spirit of the times and show the beginning of that Pharisaism with which the gospels make us so familiar.

We should suppose that this constantly increasing formalism would have been opposed by the prophets, but the prophets of the restoration were prophets in name only. They were feeble shadows of their great predecessors, destitute of originality and content to echo mechanically the Messianic predictions of an earlier day. Instead of trying to check the rising tide of ritualism, they did their best to help it along. Haggai's and Zechariah's sole aim was to incite the Jews to complete the temple. Haggai tells them that they cannot expect the divine favor until Yahweh is glorified in his temple. The old prophetic doctrine, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," is forgotten. Malachi preaches, "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Yahweh of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Prophecy had compromised with ritualism, and, having lost its ideal, had nothing more to live for. Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and he himself showed the consciousness that prophetism was dying in the declaration that Elijah, the representative of the vigorous reforming spirit of better days, must reappear before the day of Yahweh can come (Mal. 4: 5). This was the last utterance of Hebrew prophecy, a confession that it was no longer equal to its task. Ethical monotheism had triumphed over syncretism, but ritualism had triumphed over spirituality. The traditional religion of Israel and the religion of the prophets were both dead, and Judaism was born. The message of the prophets must now slumber for four centuries, dreaming perhaps from time to time in the hearts of the pious few, but not awakening until the greatest of the

prophets appeared to finish the work that his forerunners had been unable to accomplish. Jesus of Nazareth took up the task where the great prophets of Israel had left off, and once more led the world to the thought that true religion does not consist in ritual and outward righteousness, but only in love to God and love to man ; that neither in Gerizim nor in Jerusalem are men required to worship God, for " God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."